

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY
2014 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: City Year, Inc.
Program Name: City Year Tulsa

Application ID: 14ES156781

For the purpose of enhancing our programs by improving the quality and quantity of applications to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), we are providing specific feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this application. These comments are not meant to represent a comprehensive assessment; rather the analysis represents those elements that had the greatest bearing on the rating of the application. Please note that this feedback consists of summary comments from more than one reviewer. For this reason, some of the comments may seem to be inconsistent or contradictory. Comments are not representative of all of the information used in the final funding decision.

Reviewers' Summary Comments:

Strengths:

More than half of 1st - 3rd graders in the Tulsa School District target population received reading remediation in 2012. In addition, those in grades 3-8 were well below state proficiencies in reading and in mathematics. Tulsa City students also lag behind their peers in Tulsa County. The juxtaposition of facts about the two age groups in the application strongly implies that service provision in the early grades is not sufficient to keep older Tulsa students from falling behind Oklahoma state averages.

Also affecting the performance of older Tulsa City students, especially those in middle school, are higher levels of suspension and absenteeism than Oklahoma state averages with about twice as many suspensions and, on average, absences of 26 days per school year. In addition city students differ from those in the county in that they are more likely to be in poverty, i.e., eligible for free or reduced price lunch, and to be members of ethnic minorities. These data indicate that the problem and potential solution go beyond simple skill acquisition.

The application recognizes the social factors that interact with educational progress and looks beyond the impact of poor educational outcomes upon individual students to include the economic drain on the region of low graduation rates with their associated unemployment and poverty. The costs to the community of poor educational outcomes thus include lower tax revenues and greater demands on services.

The applicant has provided clear and convincing information to demonstrate a need for AmeriCorps services with regard to assisting students improve math and English scores as well as overall school climate. The proposal includes current data (2012) to support lower than state averages in reading remediation (50% compared to 33% state averages). The target area's high school graduation rate is lower than state averages while the dropout rate is higher than state averages.

The applicant describes other types of student behavior that impact academic achievement including truancy and behavior leading to school suspensions. This data is compared to County averages.

The applicant presents a very convincing case on the real need for intervention through tutoring and mentoring for 3rd to 9th graders by 50 AmeriCorps members in Tulsa, Oklahoma. In particular, the applicant references 6 target schools who serve students that “struggle with core academic subjects” from an early age. The data presented was both relevant and recent.

The applicant used 2012 statistics on reading remediation; state standardized scores for reading and math, as well as absentee rates and suspension incidences at several of the targeted schools.

The applicant cites statistics regarding the societal and economic cost of high school drop-out and low graduation rates from the Oklahoma Department of Education, 2012 School Report Cards and Profiles.

The applicant recognizes that a successful intervention will reach beyond its direct beneficiaries.

The logic model is clear and comprehensive.

The applicant demonstrates a history of past success.

The applicant outlines ongoing research into the processes and outcomes of the intervention.

The Whole School Whole Child Theory of Change on which the intervention is based is a well-researched, data-driven model for intervention with high risk students that addresses both academic and social issues. The model has a history of successful implementation at other sites including New York City. The target population in Tulsa is similar with regard to socio-economic status and educational risk to prior implementation sites. Although outcome research has until now focused primarily upon direct recipients of service, the applicant well understands the potential chain of effects from better educational outcomes to better economic outcomes for individuals and families and from individuals and families to the economic status of the community.

The applicant includes clear, concise and relevant data and research to support its intervention for the target population. According to the applicant, the program focus is targeted interventions in attendance, behavior and tutoring in English and math based on early warning indicators. This program is based on research supported by John Hopkins University.

The applicant states that City Year will deploy teams of AmeriCorps members to provide “targeted interventions” to students that will address specific drop out risk factors. The applicant further states that as of 2013, it partnered with the Tulsa public schools to support its efforts to increase the graduation pipeline for underperforming schools by placing AmeriCorps members (ages 17 to 24) in targeted schools for one year to serve as tutors, mentors, role models and to generally support school climate improvement. As such, AmeriCorps members will be utilized as highly effective means to solving the targeted communities’ problems

The applicant’s logic model was very detailed and clearly outlined the City Year Tulsa’s AmeriCorps project interventions, activities and outcomes. As a result of all these elements combined, AmeriCorps members should be a highly effective means to solving the targeted community problems.

City Year, Inc. participated in the National Performance Measure Pilot from 2011 through 2013, meeting 8 of its 13 priority and complementary performance measures over the 3 years and nearly meeting a 9th. In 2011, for example, middle grade students' attendance improved while 85% of students in grades 3-5 receiving tutoring improved their literacy scores. Teacher and principal surveys overwhelmingly reported increases in student motivation and academic performance as well as positive changes in the learning environment. The surveys also showed satisfaction with AmeriCorps members' contributions to students for whom they were role models and to faculty, 76% of whom reported that members helped them differentiate their instruction.

Data collected by teachers within the target population indicate success with improvements in student behavior and academic performance. Additional data also demonstrates specific improvements in attendance. Benchmark data was also included for literacy improvement with test scores that showed gains.

The applicant has participated in a similar grant and national pilot effort since 2011. According to the applicant, significant improvements were made when AmeriCorps members were deployed in the targeted low-performing schools. For example, an evaluation of 267 middle school students receiving attendance coaching from AmeriCorps members showed great improvement in attendance after one semester. A total of 58% of the students who had high absenteeism rates during the fall, showed significant improvement in attendance by the spring with a 90% average daily attendance rate. This and other similar positive outcomes were achieved due to the intervention of AmeriCorps members.

Weaknesses:

The data establishing need compares Tulsa City schools with those in the county. Most of the data indicate that city students lag behind those in the county. However, city and county drop-out data are inconsistent with the rest of the indicators of need and there are no comparable statewide or national drop-out, suspension or absenteeism rates reported. Nor is the relevance of minority status to school success discussed in the city/county comparison.

The applicant did not cite specific sources for all the statistics used throughout this section. It appears that all the statistics were attributed to two sources: "The Oklahoma State of Education 2012 School Report Cards" and the "2012 State Profile Report." These two sources were listed at the end of the section, and a number of relevant statistics were presented. However, the applicant did not clearly state which statistic came from which of the sources.

Although the applicant's data collection process includes surveying teachers and principals, there is little mention of further researching the effect of AmeriCorps members and their activities on participating schools in terms of such whole-school variables as school climate.

The applicant cites on page 3 that the "Whole School, Whole Child" Theory of Change will connect the AmeriCorps members' tutoring, mentoring and other school activities to all project-intended outcomes (short-, medium- and long-term student goals). The program will use an evidenced-based response to intervention approach. There were two reputable sources listed; however there was no year cited for either of the sources.

The applicant did not provide sufficient performance statistics nor report specific outcomes for its current City Year Tulsa (CYT) partnership initiative with the Tulsa school system. Instead, the applicant provided some general

information on CYT's role in the national direct grant and the national performance pilot measures which it participated in during 2011.